

# DARE Newsletter

Vol. 17, Nos. 2/3

Dictionary of American Regional English

Spring/Summer 2014

## Georgia (Still) on My Mind (Part 1)

Detlef Stark

*A number of DARE Fieldworkers logged a great many miles traveling the U.S. in pursuit of regional words and expressions, but Detlef Stark may have traveled the farthest to become a part of the DARE team. A native of Germany, Detlef developed an interest in English linguistics that brought him from Munich to Seattle to Madison . . . and from there to the state of Georgia, where he spent the summer of 1969 doing fieldwork for DARE.*

**I**n May of 1968, I graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Washington in Seattle. I had already received an English degree in my native Germany from a college specializing in the training of interpreters and translators, and I wanted to continue in graduate school. A linguistics professor at Washington, who knew about my interest in American English and my nearly two years as a lexicographer for the Langenscheidt publishing house in Germany, recommended that I write to Professor Frederic Cassidy at UW–Madison. I did, and Mr. Cassidy offered me a part-time job as a pre-editor for *DARE*, starting in the fall of 1968. I was admitted to the English department and, because I had the job, became a Wisconsin resident.

At *DARE* I gradually became acquainted with the work being done there. Going through the 325-page questionnaire (QR) as a pre-editor gave me a good idea of how the fieldwork was structured and what was expected of the fieldworkers.

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## Georgia (Still) on My Mind *Continued from page 1*

I saw a large number of QRs from different parts of the country, and with the help of the other preeditors, supervisor Jim Hartman, and, of course, Prof. Cassidy, I learned much about *DARE*'s work. During my first semesters in Madison I took several linguistics courses, among them an intensive course in phonetics and phonology. I began thinking about the idea of trying some fieldwork myself. Even—or especially—now, I'm amazed by my presumption that I could do it, but at the time it seemed like a logical next step. I asked Prof. Cassidy if he would let me do fieldwork in the summer of 1969, and he agreed surprisingly quickly.

Of the regions that were still available for fieldwork, the northern half of Georgia seemed to me the most interesting. It would be very different from the areas of the U.S. I knew, I assumed, and it was, as I found out later. I was assigned six places, all of them small or very small towns, with one exception: Atlanta. I listened to "Arthur the Rat" many times, and Jim Hartman gave me a crash course in the most important pronunciation features to be expected in that part of Georgia.

Before I could get started, I had to buy a car. It had to be fairly large, because I intended to sleep in it. On a campus bulletin board, someone offered a 1960 Chevrolet station wagon for sale. It looked a bit worn and the windshield wipers didn't work, but it was exactly what I had in mind, and for \$90.00 it became mine. I had the wipers fixed, and on June 16, 1969, I set off for Georgia.

Three days later I arrived at my first post, Rabun Gap, in the northeastern corner of Georgia, just south of the North Carolina border. It was an isolated area, heavily wooded and hilly, with a few houses here and there. My first attempt to find in-

“I've written columns culled from the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* before, but it wasn't easy. I always had to thumb through the pages like a caveman—or beg editor and nice person Joan Hall to send me a list of terms.

No more! Now, finally, *DARE* is available digitally, allowing this deep well of regional English to be searched easily. This is a bonanza for writers and word nerds everywhere, so get a subscription or take your library hostage until it does so.”

Mark Peters

Language columnist for the *Visual Thesaurus*  
([www.visualthesaurus.com](http://www.visualthesaurus.com))

formants was not successful; people in a small store seemed wary of strangers, especially if they drove cars with Wisconsin plates. On a map I found a reference to the private Rabun Gap–Nacoochee High School. I managed to see the principal, and he recommended that I talk to a young teacher at his school, Eliot Wigginton, who had developed a writing project around the local customs, crafts, and history. Students would go out, interview longtime residents, and then collect their written work in a little publication, *Foxfire Magazine*. Later, Wigginton and the *Foxfire* project became nationally known. The project still exists today.

I met Wigginton, a relaxed and friendly man of twenty-seven, and almost immediately I had a list of potential informants. Nearly all of them turned out to be very good indeed. Wigginton was extremely helpful in every respect. In particular, his remarks on the local dialect, part of the larger Appalachian English region, gave me the background I lacked. During the week I spent there, he introduced me to dozens of people and took me up into the mountains in his Jeep to meet families who lived there in almost complete isolation, great poverty, and, often enough, squalor. To me, all this was no less than stunning. (In the early seventies, the film *Deliverance* was shot in this area and in some of the very houses I had visited; when I saw it, the recreation of the atmosphere that I remembered was amazingly precise.)

On the second day, Wigginton introduced me to Mr. C., a 58-year-old man who lived with his wife and four young daughters in what must be called a shack. There was no running water. Mr. C., as it happened, was not only one of the best informants I had during my time in Georgia, but also a bright, warmhearted, and generous man whom I remember with great fondness and gratitude. We spent hour after hour on the QR, often four or five hours in a row. He had spent all his life near Rabun Gap, and he knew so much about "life in the hills" that it didn't take much to get him to talk about it. One of the more fascinating topics was the extensive making and selling of moonshine some years ago. It was, of necessity, just one way of earning some money in this bitterly poor region.

Every day I spent with the family, I was invited to dinner. More than once we had fish fingers, grits, baked beans, and corn bread. I can only say that I truly enjoyed the meals, the company, and the atmosphere. We would talk about the world in general till late at night, and then I would return to Black Rock State Park atop a nearby hill. Later, I would meet more people who didn't have very

much but who were open and generous with what they did have.

Not everybody was so kind. While driving around Rabun Gap, I had a flat tire and had to get a new (i.e., used) one. One afternoon I drove up to a solitary gas station and tried to find the attendant. I finally found him sleeping on a mattress in the back of his shop. I told him what I needed, and he showed me several used, perilously worn tires which seemed unacceptable to me. He insisted that they were perfectly good. When I said no, he suddenly flew into a rage: "Get the hell out of here, you bastard Yankee!" he yelled. "Don't wait till I get my .38!"

I didn't.

(I should mention here that before leaving Madison, I had decided to retire my first name, Detlef, at least for the duration of the trip. I had to spell it every time I was introduced, and even then many people found it difficult to pronounce or remember. So from the first day on, I was "Jim Stark.")

After about a week with several other good informants, including a woman who knew much about cooking, plants, and quilting, fieldwork in Rabun Gap was done. On the last day, Eliot Wigginton and I had dinner together. I told him how grateful I was for his help, then packed up my stuff and got ready to go to Ball Ground, 100 miles southwest of Rabun Gap.

Not far from Ball Ground, I found George Washington Carver State Park, where I intended to stay overnight. A friendly African-American ranger stopped me at the gate and told me gently that this was a park for "colored people only." It was my first encounter with segregation.

Ball Ground was small, but it did have a short main street and a Baptist church. As before, I tried the local school principal for leads and was given the name of the owner of a stonemason workshop, Charles Hubert Watkins, who had written *Yesterday in the Hills* (Quadrangle Books, 1963), a book about Ball Ground, its people and customs. This sounded promising. I tried to find him, but couldn't locate him. I decided to wait in the church parking lot and write in my journal in the meantime. A young man drove up and asked if I was waiting for the pastor. Well, yes. He turned out to be the pastor, and I told him about my work (and, a little later, about my attempts to find a place to park my car overnight). Matter-of-factly, he invited me to stay at his house for as long as I was in Ball Ground. It was a generous offer, which I gratefully accepted. I did in fact stay for eight days, and Pastor and

Mrs. C. became good friends of mine in a very short time. It was nice to come home at night and talk about what had happened during the day. On these occasions, I was also tutored in Southern Baptist theology, but that was quite all right; all was new and interesting.

The next day I met Mr. Watkins, who was in his seventies, and he became a good informant, knowledgeable and with a good sense of humor. He loved to talk about "the olden days" and about his son Floyd, a professor of English at Emory University and the coauthor of his book. Through Mr. Watkins I found other informants, some of them members of his extended family. During the interviews, my informants would often open up. We would talk about the town and its people, including some relevant gossip, and after a few days the place seemed more than a little familiar to me. Although practically all the people I met were pleasant and welcoming, some topics had to be avoided. It was not a good idea to talk about politics, segregation, religion, or the Civil War.

Work in Ball Ground was different from that in Rabun Gap. There, virtually all the informants had been brought to me through Eliot Wigginton; here I had to talk to many people before I could pick a person who had the right kind of background, understood the questions readily, and was willing to spend several hours with me and my QR. Some agreed to an interview but gave up after a few questions. Others simply didn't show up. Quite a number of good informants did not want to be recorded on tape. These were some of the inevitable frustrations of fieldwork that, after a while, I learned to live with.

Before I left Ball Ground, I had a chance to observe and listen to a Pentecostal preacher at a small radio station in nearby Canton where Pastor C. also had a weekly program. It was a fire-and-brimstone sermon that reverberated throughout the building and left the minister exhausted, shaking, and sweating profusely—a difficult experience, and unlike anything I had ever seen in the context of religion.

The next day I said good-bye to my hosts, Pastor and Mrs. C., then dropped by Hubert Watkins' house. He gave me his book and inscribed it for his "new-found friend, Jim Stark, who loves our hills and our crude way of life." As I write this, it is sitting here next to me. ♦

[The conclusion of this article will appear in the Fall 2014 issue of our Newsletter.]

## Chief Editor's Funding Update

Joan Houston Hall

As I explained in the Winter issue of this *Newsletter*, *DARE*'s tenuous financial situation obligated me to send notices of layoff or non-renewal to staff members as of June 30, 2014. Two long-term colleagues decided that they were eager to see what retirement would offer as the next chapter of their lives, and another graciously agreed to a reduction in time.

With generous gifts from many of you who responded to my appeal for help, we have been able to raise the support for a reduced staff through next spring. We look forward to using the many new citations in our electronic database to update current entries in the digital version of *DARE* (<[www.daredictionary.com](http://www.daredictionary.com)>), and to adding new entries as well.

After September 30, we will also concentrate on analyzing the data collected in the "Do You Speak Wisconsin?" survey. Do people in the Badger State still have *baga*, *Berliner*, and *booya* as part of their food vocabulary? How about *kolacky*, *kringle*, and *krumkake*? Do they still play *court whist*, *sheepshead*, and *smear*? I know they still canoe on the *flowage* and celebrate their *golden birthdays*. What other words have enriched Wisconsinites' lexicon in the last half-century?

Carrying out these editorial and research tasks will depend on your help. Please consider using the coupon in the next column to make a tax-deductible donation. We are grateful to those of you who have supported *DARE* for decades and to others who have learned about us recently. Please spread the word! America is filled with people who love our language and its myriad varieties. I feel sure that they, too, would be glad to be a part of *DARE*'s continuing success. ♦

### Digital *DARE* Quiz Winner

Congratulations to Leslie Scott of Columbus, Ohio. She is the winner of the digital scavenger hunt, having correctly answered all twenty-six of the quiz questions posed in our Winter 2014 issue. Leslie's prize is a one-year subscription to the digital version of *DARE*, which she can use to look up such "Ohio words" as *Johnny Marzetti* (a casserole that may have taken its name from a Columbus restaurant). You, too, can find words from your neck of the woods (or any other region of the U.S.). To browse 100 sample entries or get information on purchasing a full-access subscription, go to <[www.daredictionary.com](http://www.daredictionary.com)>. ♦

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“I am a poet working on my second book of poems. I wish I had known about your series when I was a Poetry fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing; my office was in Helen C. White! . . . I would have loved to meet you all and talk about this fascinating project. . . . I am a huge language nerd, and I have literally spent hours on end with every volume of *DARE* I can get my hands on. It is such an amazing treasure. I own Volumes I and IV, and often check out the others from the library. I have been thinking that I would love to write some poems based on some of the entries in *DARE*—sort of collage poems that are musical arrangements or juxtapositions of some of the really textured lines and speech—sometimes interspersed with my own lines and lyric fragments. I have read plenty of ‘dictionary poems’ written just this way by many poets, but a series based on *DARE* would be much more flavorful and strange.”

Ashley Capps  
E-mail correspondent



As we carry out a new round of fieldwork online, Chief Editor Joan Hall poses beside a photo of original Chief Editor Frederic G. Cassidy, who sent out the first DARE Fieldworkers nearly fifty years ago.

### “Do You Speak Wisconsin?” Online Survey Extended

The last issue of our *Newsletter* described the new round of research into regional vocabulary that *DARE* is conducting here in Wisconsin. There’s still time to participate! The survey period has been extended through September 30, 2014. See the Winter 2014 *DARE Newsletter* (available at <<http://dare.wisc.edu/content/dare-newsletters>>) for details, or go to <<https://study.uwsc.wisc.edu/dare>> to take part.

Comments we’ve received from survey participants include the following:

“This is fun!”

“This was interesting. I’d like to go back to look at other answers that people gave.”

“I would love to see this kind of survey done for New York!”

“I am sending this out to my dad and people in Antigo. I love this project.”

“What a blast! I love regional dialects [and] wish I had time to do more subject areas!”

If you’re a current or former long-term resident of the Badger State, you have until September 30 to let us know how *you* “speak Wisconsin”! ♦



### A Postscript on *Plog(ged)*

Anne Curzan’s article in our Winter 2014 issue, “‘All Plogged Up’ . . . Am I All Alone?” (available at <<http://dare.wisc.edu/content/dare-newsletters>>), asked whether anyone outside her family knew and used the word *plog(ged)*. As it turns out, Prof. Curzan is *not* alone in her use of this blend of *plug* and *clog*, and readers contacted her and *DARE* to weigh in on the matter.

Robyn Cope wrote, “I grew up near Cincinnati, Ohio. Our toilet occasionally got ‘plogged up’ (not ‘plogged’), but our noses never did.” Oregon resident Peter Richardson said, “I’ve used *plog(ged)* as long as I can remember. For the record, I grew up in northeastern Illinois (five miles from Lake Michigan, five miles south of the Wisconsin line) and am 71 years old.” Another correspondent found print evidence of the word, pointing Joan Houston Hall to the following entry in James Halliwell’s *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*: “PLOG. To clog, or hinder. *Sussex*.” ♦

“I have used *DARE* in a History of Science class to illustrate the huge changes not only in farming technology over the decades, but also the differences in people’s perceptions of the tools and equipment and the differences in names from one part of the country to another.”

Tom Broman  
Professor  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

## DARE Essay Contest Winner

*Simon Winchester's contest announcement in our Winter 2014 Newsletter invited entrants to submit "500 well-chosen words, fashioned into an essay of elegance, logic, and persuasive power that will answer the simple question: how would you use DARE to enrich and improve your writing?" A committee of the DARE Board of Visitors chose Amy Clark's essay as the winner, and Amy has been awarded a three-year subscription to the digital version of the Dictionary of American Regional English. We are very pleased to publish her prizewinning entry here.*

### DARE to Dream

Amy Clark

One of my favorite words, coined by George Ella Lyon, is "voiceplace." It brings together two key elements of a person's culture, and defines my life's work and writing: empowering the marginalized voices of a marginalized place.

My voiceplace is central Appalachia, where railroad tracks connect squares of farmland, woods and town like the seams of a patchwork quilt. I was never taught my linguistic history at school—only "good" and "bad" binaries of English (my home voice falling into the "bad" category)—but I knew that my great-grandmother's words like *counterpin* for quilt and *pea-fowl* for the colorful birds that honked and clattered on the smokehouse roof were from another era. Preachers' voices had rhythm in the way they found a cadence and followed it as they recited the KJV Bible and wove those words together with their own: *It don't matter what comes; thou art with me.* I heard front porch stories in our *hollers* about *haints*.

As Linda Scott DeRosier says, we carry our histories in our mouths.

My home dialect almost always infuses my writing. I have invited it into students' writing, as well. I tell them our voices are living artifacts that have survived five hundred years of critics, persecution, and predictions of leveling. There is nothing "incorrect" or "wrong" about them. For some, coming to terms with the voiceplace is a struggle. Others have called it life-changing in how they learn to write.

Dialect variation in writing matters because words and grammar patterns are more than their meanings. They can function as instruments of power or tell us what we need to know about people. In some parts of Appalachia, the pro-

nunciation of one vowel, such as *Appalaycha* for Appalachia, can mark an outsider. It can also link people hundreds of miles apart, like the pronunciation of *wash* as *worsh*, spoken in Jonesville, Virginia, and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dialect variation—if used effectively—can flavor fiction. Denise Giardina's opening line to her novel *Storming Heaven* reads, "They is many a way to mark a baby while it is still yet in the womb." Instantly, we know something about the narrator's region, superstition, and age. And searching for dialect variation in primary sources such as early journals and letters is one of the best ways for us to date and study spoken language, like the way my great-grandmother wrote "*arthritis* remedy" in her recipe book. Digging through lace-like script for phonetic spelling is how I imagine it feels to brush sand from an ancient fossil.

Access to *DARE* would be invaluable in my writing and teaching, and expand what I can offer my students as they learn about their linguistic histories. As I talk about the legitimacy of dialects, the *why* behind our rich tapestry of voices in this country, particularly for writing teachers with misguided (and misinformed) strategies for standardizing their students' written and spoken Englishes, *DARE* would strengthen my position on dialect variation in a society where sameness seems to be a privileged, institutionalized concept. ♦

*Amy Clark is an Associate Professor of English in the Communication Studies department at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, where she teaches courses in Appalachian language and literature, rhetoric, and applied linguistics. Her areas of specialization include writing pedagogies, rural literacies, and Appalachian studies. Dr. Clark is co-founder and co-director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at UVa-Wise, as well as founding director of the Appalachian Writing Project.*

“Many, many thanks for donating your time to come to our little library and for presenting your fascinating research on our quirky language! It was a very educational and entertaining evening for those of us lucky enough to be here to listen. . . . I'll definitely be purchasing a set for our library of the *DARE*. It will be a fine addition to our reference collection.”

Kris Daugherty  
Director, Poynette Area Public Library  
Poynette, Wisconsin

## DARE Staff Departures

The month of June brought change to the *DARE* offices, as two staff members retired and a UW Foundation colleague made a career transition. We take this opportunity to bid all three of them farewell.



Technical Typist and Production Assistant Catherine Attig was hired in 1985 to type *Dictionary* entries (many of them handwritten on 4" x 6" slips of paper) using a DOS-based computer program. Over the course of her twenty-nine years at *DARE*, Cathy saw her job change in ways she could never have anticipated, and she rose to every challenge. As *DARE*'s use of technology expanded, so did her responsibilities; among other things, Cathy assisted with computer hardware and software maintenance, trained and supervised student workers and volunteers, indexed and evaluated audiotape content, was instrumental in preparing the text of all six print volumes for digital publication, and played a major role in planning and implementing the "Do You Speak Wisconsin?" online survey. In addition, she still managed to type and code every *DARE* entry written or revised during her tenure here.

The only *DARE* staffer to hail from New England, Cathy not only advised her co-workers on the vocabulary of that area, but introduced us to scrumptious regional desserts. Cranberry bump,

gems, and apple pudding are only a few of the initially unfamiliar baked items that quickly became favorites at office birthday parties and holiday celebrations. We hope retirement will bring Cathy the opportunity to enjoy traveling, spending time outdoors, photographing nature, gardening, knitting, and reading.



Ginny Bormann came to *DARE* in 2005. As our Financial Specialist, she not only paid the bills, did the payroll, and prepared the budgets, but kept track of grant and gift accounts, ordered supplies and equipment, maintained various mailing lists, and kept us in compliance with complex and ever-changing University, state, and federal regulations. She also brightened office parties and coffee breaks with her culinary creations, from tasty low-carb fare to decadent tortes and cheesecakes. We suspect Ginny will have no problem keeping busy in retirement, as she'll have more time to pursue her interests in beekeeping, herbalism, social and political activism, and animal rescue.

As a Director of Development for the UW–Madison College of Letters & Science, Toni Drake began working with *DARE* in 2013, helping us to raise funds and public awareness. Toni recently left her position with the University of Wisconsin Foundation to spend more time with her three-year-old daughter and newborn son. We trust that when the children are old enough to drink from a *bubbler* or play *kittenball*, Toni (a native Madisionian) will show them the print or digital version of *DARE* and explain that those are Wisconsin terms. ♦

**DARE Newsletter**

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